

Ford, Rea on Ankerberg Show

In the fall of 1982, Dr. Desmond Ford and Pastor Walter Rea appeared together on the John Ankerberg TV show—a weekly, 30-minute program focusing on controversial Christian issues. This nondenominational, viewer-supported program utilizes an informal discussion format and often presents Christians and non-Christians together in exchanges of viewpoint.

Aired over the satellite CBN (Christian Broadcasting Network) and PTL (Praise The Lord) networks and nine other stations in the United States, the potential audience is large. Host John Ankerberg is a young but experienced evangelist who earned the B.A., M.A., and M.Div. degrees, and is currently finishing requirements for his doctorate.

An Adventist layman who knows Ankerberg heard that a gospel congress was going to be held by Good News Unlimited in the Chattanooga, Tennessee, area in August 1982. Since this is where the Ankerberg show originates, the layman saw an opportunity for Ankerberg to interview GNU minister Desmond Ford. When Ankerberg and his assistant Bob Gerow were approached, they were interested because some Adventist controversies are similar to problems now surfacing in other denominations. Arrangements were also made to include decredentialed Adventist minister Walter Rea.

Beyond his own research, Ankerberg met with Chattanooga area Adventists familiar with the issues. Ankerberg also read official and unofficial Adventist publications, including *Questions on Doctrine*, *The Great Controversy*, *Omega*, *The White Lie*, and Ford's Glacier View document.

In early July, Ankerberg phoned and wrote the following Adventist leaders, inviting them to represent the church on the program with Ford and Rea: Neal Wilson, Robert Olson, Victor Cooper, Warren Johns and William Johnsson. All declined for various reasons; but the impression received was that they did not wish to participate in a

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public airing of theological differences that, they felt, should be handled privately, within the church.

The program was taped on 2 August 1982 and edited into four separate 30-minute segments. The first segment focused on



Ford's discussion of the 1844 movement and the traditional Adventist belief in an investigative judgment. Ford started the conversation by addressing Ankerberg:

If I may just give a moment of background—you said you were not a Seventh-day Adventist—I accept that apology. [laughter] I am one, and I love the church; but I want to see it come into full harmony with Scripture. Adventists have long claimed to be the heirs of the Reformation, based on the primacy and the adequacy and the sufficiency of Holy Writ. It was based on the priesthood of all believers and justification by faith. I want to see my church come into full harmony [with Scripture] in these areas. I believe the church has made a great contribution to Christendom, . . . but the sanctuary as usually presented by Seventh-day Adventists . . . has taken assurance from the vast membership of the church.

In the second segment, Rea described the events which led him to write *The White Lie*. He outlined his discovery of Mrs. White's ubiquitous source dependence. He explained how he shared his findings with the White Estate, and how he met with a committee of 18 scholars and administrators in 1980 to demonstrate to them his findings. The committee agreed that the borrowing was more extensive than they had believed and voted that it should be brought to the attention of the church. They also recommended that Rea be given scholarly help to bring his research into presentable form. But within two months Rea received a letter from the General Conference that essentially said, according to Rea, "We'll take it from here."

Rea and Ford discussed their varying view of Mrs. White's inspiration and her impact on Adventist theology. Then Ankerberg summed up the program with a brief recounting of the conversations between Walter

Martin and the General Conference in the mid-fifties that led to the "infamous" *Questions on Doctrine*, and a warning of sorts:

In 1980, the denomination appears to have elevated Ellen G. White's interpretation of Scripture to a position equal in authority with Scripture itself. Now, it seems, she is the only authoritative interpreter of Scripture for Adventists. This crucial decision by the leadership of Adventism has forced evangelical leaders to reevaluate. It's the consensus of those with whom I have talked that if in belief and practice the Adventist leaders abide by this decision, they will have turned their great church down the road to being a cult by denying the basic tenets of the Christian faith.

The third and concluding program was primarily a question and answer period with audience participation. The fourth program, on the Davenport issue, was never completely edited for production. Ankerberg preferred to focus on issues that directly involve the gospel. The Davenport discussion is, however, included on the unedited audio cassettes and printed transcripts. The three programs aired on CBN in late September and early October, and in mid October and early November on the PTL network. It is not known when the programs will be repeated.

Response to the programs, as with any controversial topics, has been mixed. Many Adventist pastors have written Ankerberg to express their agreement with Ford or Rea, stating that they no longer consider Ellen White's inspiration to be of canonical authority.

The four segments are available on audio cassettes for a \$15 contribution or as written transcripts for a gift of \$5 to: The John Ankerberg TV Show, P.O. Box 8977, Chattanooga, TN 37411.